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The 36 teacher-participants at the 1967 NDEA Summer Institute in English for speakers of other languages, held at the University of Montana, came from public, private, and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools in eight Western states. Their pupils represented 16 Indian tribes, ranging from Navaho, where many children come to school knowing no English, to Salish and Kutenai, where most beginning school children speak English. Estimated enrollment of these schools ranged from 25 percent to 100 percent Indian. In addition to estimating the attendance, the participants were asked to categorize their students according to whether they spoke (1) standard English, (2) nonstandard English, (3) little or no English, or (4) standard English, but with limited vocabulary due to socioeconomic conditions. Categorization was difficult for some teachers because of their standards of oral speech and "degree of teacher permissiveness," as well as the fact that many teachers were quite unaware of the speech of their students. Figures arrived at from the teachers' evaluations tend to suggest "the lamentable conclusion that many children who attend our schools to learn English only succeed in learning a nonstandard variety, or in preserving it if they arrive speaking nonstandard English." (AMM)

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Teaching English to the Indian of the Plains and the Northwest

Mary Rita Miller

The thirty-six participants at the NDEA Institute in English for speakers of other languages at the University of Montana in the summer of 1967 came from eight states in the western United States, and for many of them it was their first contact with ESOL. Indeed, some had never heard of ESOL prior to the winter of 1966–67 when the institute announcement came to their attention, and two had had any previous training in this field. Together they taught children from sixteen Indian tribes, ranging from Navajo, where many children come to school knowing no English, to Salish and Kutenai, where most children speak English when they begin school.

All the participants were closely involved in the problem of Indian education. By definition a participant in this institute came from a school where at least 20% of the enrollment was Indian. Some came from schools where the enrollment was 100% Indian. The percentage of Indian enrollment and the question of who is Indian and who is not, however, is blurred by the fact of considerable intermarriage with whites in some areas, and differing criteria for determining Indian and non-Indian status. According to the best estimate available, eleven participants came from schools where the enrollment of Indian children ranged from 25–50%; five came from schools where the Indian enrollment varied from 51–94%; but the vast majority (twenty participants) had an Indian enrollment of 95–100% in their schools. Schools sending teachers to the institute were public, private, and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. As might be expected, the BIA schools had the highest percentages of Indian children enrolled, six of them with 100% Indian enrollment. Four of these all-Indian schools enrolled Navajo children, one enrolled Navajo and Apache children, and the sixth school enrolled Sioux children. A BIA school in North Dakota had the lowest Indian enrollment, with an estimated 87% of its enrollees being Indian.

Three teachers represented two private schools. One of these schools was in Idaho and 98% of its enrollment was Indian. The other school, in Montana, was an all-Indian school. While it might be anticipated that most Indian children attended BIA or private mission schools, one public school in Idaho enrolled 98% Indian children, and another in Washington was 97% Indian. In Montana it was particularly interesting to note that six participants came from public schools where Indian enrollment exceeded 95%, and another Montana school was 80% Indian. These figures regarding enrollment percentages, as well as all other such figures in the report, must be viewed as approximate, as each participant was asked to estimate not only the percentage of Indian children attending his school without recourse to

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AL 001 593

any supporting figures, but also to estimate a considerable variety of other things on which he was only partially prepared to pass expert judgment. In addition, all figures are based not on a single, individual judgment, admittedly not professional nor substantiated, but on thirty-six such personal judgments. The results were consolidated and an effort made to bring some meaningful order to the statistics.

The participants were next asked to categorize their students according to whether they spoke standard English, non-standard English, or little or no English. Since the school systems represented did not offer kindergarten, most children did not begin school until the age of six or seven, or sometimes later. It was therefore assumed that the oral language structure of these students was developed pretty much to the state of other speakers in the home or neighborhood. The participating teachers were asked to apply these categories to the children when they first began school. While all the teachers taught elementary school children (first through sixth), and all administrators administered elementary schools, some of them were not in really intimate contact with first graders, and again it was necessary to estimate not only each student's status at the earliest level of his education but also the dividing points between standard English and non-standard English on the one hand, and the difference between speaking some English and not speaking it on the other. Some effort was expended in attempting to formalize the guidelines for each category, but for all this, the results are still very approximate. There are two reasons for this, both of linguistic interest. The first has to do with the teacher's standards of oral speech plus something which might be called the degree of teacher permissiveness.

The second reason is that most teachers, without realizing it, sought only to perceive the message conveyed by the linguistic signal without any attention to the structure of the linguistic signal itself. Since most teachers were oriented toward acceptable norms in reading and writing only, they were quite unaware of the speech of their students. Thus many of them struggled in the classroom to teach passable written expression, which is only a representation of language, while they remained deaf to the oral expression which is the language itself. The question of language proficiency was further complicated by the fact that some participants felt that a fourth category was needed, along with standard English, non-standard English, and no English. Some students attending their schools spoke standard English, but their chances for academic success had been prejudiced by a variety of socio-economic conditions which resulted in a lack of meaningful experiences, concepts, and the language needed to express them. Children in this category lacked both linguistic and non-linguistic experiences expected in a "normal" first-grader. They especially lacked adequate vocabulary.

With the establishment of four categories, every participant felt that he could classify every student in one of the four classes, and estimates were accordingly made. In the twenty schools where the enrollment was 95–100% Indian, teachers felt that no more than 20% of the children spoke standard English. This means that the other 80% in each school spoke no English,

spoke non-standard English, or were severely disadvantaged language-wise when they enrolled in school. Where the Indian enrollment was 51–94%, the total number of beginners lacking standard English closely paralled the number of Indian children enrolled. For example, in one school where 50% spoke no English when they entered school, and 35% spoke non-standard English, the total Indian enrollment was 90%. In another school, where 10–15% spoke no English when they entered school, and 70–80% spoke non-standard English, the total Indian enrollment in that school was 87%. In a third school 80% of the children spoke non-standard English and the Indian enrollment was also estimated at 80%.

Of course it cannot be determined, in spite of the seeming correspondence of percentages, whether the children who did not speak standard English were in fact all Indian children. In some schools, where the percentage of speakers of standard dialect was considerably less than the total Indian enrollment, it is clear that the problem of spoken English in these communities is not confined to Indians. These figures tend to suggest the lamentable conclusion that the many children who attend our schools to learn English only succeed in learning a non-standard variety, or in preserving it if they arrive speaking non-standard English. The figures are all the more damning when we realize that some of these evaluations were undoubtedly made, not of first graders, but of fifth and sixth graders. It seems natural that teachers of the upper grades would be influenced in their evaluation of beginners at their schools by conditions in their own classrooms. It appears that large numbers of children in certain areas attend school without ever learning standard English, and because this complicates and all but destroys academic accomplishment, when they have complied with the minimum requirements of the law, they drop out.

Even allowing for a considerable margin of error, there was nevertheless general agreement that large numbers of students do not know or learn standard English in the lower grades. According to the participants, in only six schools among the entire number represented did 50% or more of the students speak standard English. For example, in one school where the enrollment was 20–25% Indian, only 25% spoke standard English. In another school, the Indian enrollment was 30% but only 20% of the student body spoke standard English.

The participants were also asked whether or not they had an oral language period. Four reported no oral language period at all. Of those who had an oral language period, the time varied from five or ten minutes daily to as much as one hour daily. However, indications are that these periods were sometimes catch-alls for many and varied activities, some not connected with oral language, others only incidentally connected with it. The "show and tell" period, storytime, reading, spelling, and vocabulary drills were typical activities during the oral language period. In other areas, notably in BIA schools in Navajo country, the oral language period was well utilized with carefully planned and supervised lessons in English as a second language. Participants from these schools who had had no previous formal train-

ing in ESOL methods and subject matter had sometimes remedied their lack of training with considerable outside reading. This small but challenging group promoted some of the most rewarding moments in the institute. Still other teachers were not aware of an oral language problem and were totally ignorant of its obvious connection with poor achievement in other areas, especially reading.

The participants were next asked to comment on the motivation of their students, an elusive quality to evaluate, and perhaps one even more difficult to deal with objectively. Comments varied from "wildly enthusiastic" to "reluctant," with special teachers and reading specialists bearing the brunt of the indifference. It was also noted that the degree of enthusiasm generally subsided as the grade went up, so that most first grade teachers reported high motivation, and most fifth and sixth grade teachers reported poor motivation. Subsequent discussions in class which attempted to verify this trend toward growing tired of school and to assess possible reasons for it more than confirmed the preliminary conclusions. The typical Indian child was portrayed as interested and alight with curiosity when he began school. Unfortunately, this light is gradually extinguished, it appears, as he grows up, by largely unknown causes, until the Indian student in upper elementary school is best characterized as passive and "silent." Effective communication with him has often ceased, and education has stopped for all intents. It was suggested that the cause is partly cultural, for it is at this time that the child realizes that being Indian is different from being white. However, many also acknowledged that the Indian child in the upper grades cannot express his thoughts, which are rapidly becoming more complicated and sophisticated, and as a consequence he withdraws into silent linguistic frustration. In addition, he is a poor reader, misses a great deal of what is going on in the classroom, and thus has no feeling of accomplishment.

Teachers were asked to evaluate community attitudes on education. The comments of the participants regarding community interest in education were nearly as varied as those regarding student motivation, ranging from poor to excellent. Some of the more expressive comments were "timid," "dollar-conscious," or "positive." When asked to comment on administrative attitudes toward education, and particularly toward ESOL, similar comments were given, although it appeared that a great many administrators were enthusiastically behind ESOL training. One delightful participant described the attitude of her administrators as "over anxious," while participating principals and one superintendent participant said they looked with favor upon new materials and methods. While a few characterized administrative attitudes as frugal or conservative, in general teachers supported the policies of their administrators, and administrators the policies of their school boards.

Support for superiors, whether administrators or school boards, was further reinforced by the fact that no participant cited school policy as a major teaching problem. Poor attendance of students at school was a general complaint heard everywhere but at boarding schools, but more shocking were repeated complaints of no breakfast and little sleep for small children, as well

as other types of parental neglect. Differing values seemed related to the parental concept of education, and more specifically to irregular patterns of attendance, meals, and sleep. Teachers in general had little knowledge of Indian culture, and this was an important area of misunderstanding. For this reason, the anthropology course given in the institute was of special interest to participants, and all of them expressed appreciation of the new insights they had gained. While many participants listed non-linguistic problems as being the most thorny ones, twenty of the thirty-six mentioned problems which can be considered language connected. Specific mention was made by many of the lack of communication between teacher and student, of socially withdrawn and "silent" students, of the lack of student ability to speak or write English, of inattention and inability to comprehend what was going on in the classroom, of lack of interest, of poor self-expression, of inability to understand what they read even if they could pronounce the words, and of non-standard speech. Above all, teachers lamented the inability of their students to read.

While the silent, withdrawn child may have non-linguistic problems, in a bilingual setting it seems certain that some of these children are suffering from lack of proper tools to communicate. The fact that many of them speak only limited English after reaching the middle grades points to the fact that school, and reading in particular, must be almost incomprehensible exercise for them. Some drastic steps seem necessary to convert the eager Indian child who arrives at school knowing no English into the sixth grader with the versatility to make school a meaningful experience. It is first of all suggested that the quiet, orderly classroom must go. This should be replaced by a noisy, orderly classroom, filled with the sound of participating students. The noise should be the sound of English speech. A great deal of opportunity for speaking is necessary to learn a language well. This will require a new concept of classroom discipline, a great deal of understanding from administrators, and healthy nerves from everyone; but especially it will require teachers who know how to make effective use of oral language in teaching standard English. It will require cooperation from teachers of other disciplines, especially remedial reading, and the acknowledgment by all that children do not easily learn to read a dialect they cannot speak. Children who need remedial reading will begin with intensified remedial work in oral language. In addition, the teacher will give up the idea of monologue in the classroom. Instead, he will become an expert in eliciting natural replies and discussion somewhat longer and more complete than "yes" and "no."

The task is overwhelming, but it is also an exciting one. Most of all, it is of primary importance that all those children who have somehow failed to learn acceptable English in this country be given the opportunity to do so.

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